

# Media Response

April 5, 2019

Brad McElhinny, Metro News

**Can you clarify this statement in the Auditor's report? As of June 2018, the state had more than 575 projects dating back to disasters in 2012, 2014, and 2015 waiting to be reviewed and closed out for local governments.**

- As of March 29, 2019, all projects prior to 3/31/15 have been completed.

**The auditor also says this: During our investigation, we inquired about the status of the close-outs and were shocked to learn that the State was behind on close-outs and were still trying to complete close-outs from disaster declaration in 2012.**

**Is that true, and what's the holdup? If it takes so long, what are the financial effects on flooded communities?**

- It is important to note that the close-out process is for Public Assistance grants, and not the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
- From March 31, 2015 to July 12, 2018 the State of West Virginia suffered 9 federally declared disasters.
  - The result: over 2,000 projects requesting Public Assistance funding.
  - The staff at both DHSEM and FEMA who are assigned to help complete or close out these requests are also performing double and even triple duties.
  - They are involved in the emergency response to these disasters as well as the immediate recovery activities such as preliminary damage assessments.
  - Recognizing the resulting toll of such a workload, DHSEM and FEMA have increased the number of staff working on the Public Assistance program in West Virginia.
- For a project to be closed, an applicant must:
  - Complete the entire scope of work,
  - Make all final payments,
  - Request a closeout from DHSEM, and
  - Submit all documentation to support the final amount being claimed.
- Often project completion can be delayed by
  - Turnover in applicant staff,
  - Subsequent disasters damaging or impacting an applicant,

- Limitations on when work can be completed due to environmental compliance,
- And more.
- Larger and more complex projects, such as those undertaken by the Division of Highways, require significant input from engineers and outside entities before the project can begin.
- WVDSEM and FEMA are committed to continued support to communities throughout the closeout process to minimize impacts on long-term recovery.

**Is there any more detail about the state's efforts to oversee federal flood dollars -- both itself and subrecipients? Director Todorovich mentioned an internal review team on air. I notice this year's Single Audit has several recommendations having to do with DHSEM and oversight.**

- In October 2018, Governor Justice named Mike Todorovich as Director of DHSEM and asked the National Guard to take an enhanced role in oversight of DHSEM.
- DHSEM worked with FEMA to create a Critical Improvement Plan (approved by FEMA in November 2018).
  - The plan addressed the audit findings with a set of milestones to improve internal and external controls to grants management.
    - This includes the creation of the Internal Review and Grant Oversight Section.
    - This section is staffed by a CPA, a Quality Assurance Manager, a Chief Monitor and three Monitoring Coordinators who report to the Director.
  - This team has been successful in identifying problem areas within DHSEM and providing solutions to the problems.
  - Most recently two members of the team provided administrative assistance to a small town, enabling the town to have training and progress towards closeout of their award.
  - DHSEM plans to replicate this success in other communities to assist the closeout process.

**There was a Register-Herald story with the Greenbrier County OES Director taking issue with a priority shift that she said switched action from housing problems toward infrastructure projects.**

**Is there such a priority shift? And is it expressed in a document somewhere?**

- The priority shift occurred after the State became the recipient of funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
  - In November 2017, leaders met to discuss this new funding stream and discovered areas of overlap in the HUD and HMPG funding.

- Since HUD would cover many of the same individual property issues as HMPG, the leaders decided to focus HMPG on infrastructure projects.
  - The infrastructure projects would serve many more citizens and help entire towns and counties become more resilient.
- There is no documentation of this priority shift. There was a verbal directive from leadership that informed the process of ranking applications.
  - Using a benefit-cost analysis and the infrastructure directive, DHSEM ranked each application.
  - Those applications that did not fall within the allotted funding were added to an oversubscribed list. The applications for all projects, including oversubscribed, were submitted to FEMA.
  - As of this date, two projects (one for Kanawha and the other for Greenbrier County) have been moved to the funding for Disaster #4331 and submitted to FEMA for approval.
    - DR-4331 is Severe Storms, Flooding, Landslides, And Mudslides that occurred July 28-29, 2017; it was declared a major disaster on August 18, 2017.
    - This declaration made Hazard Mitigation Grant Program assistance requested by Governor Justice available for hazard mitigation measures statewide.

**If there is not necessarily a priority shift, can you provide a further description of housing, infrastructure and economic development as priorities that may be subject to the same time and resources?**

***Clarification: I would like to know how hazard mitigation grant projects are chosen and what doesn't make the cut.***

- Due to the magnitude of the 2016 flooding, there was no way the State and FEMA could fund all applications for HMGP. The applications were ranked by applying a benefit-cost analysis and the infrastructure directive.
  - Because the State received disaster-relief funding from HUD, the HMGP focus went to infrastructure projects that would serve a greater number of people and allow entire communities to become more resilient.

**Can you explain what a global match project is?**

Through HMGP, a successful applicant receives 75% of the project award from FEMA. The applicant is expected to supply the remaining 25% to complete the project. West Virginia is one of the few states in the nation to reimburse that 25% using State dollars upon successful completion of a project, allowing communities and property owners to financially recover from disasters more quickly.

**There has been talk of the Mayor of Clendenin, Shana Clendenin, taking a job at DHSEM. I have not yet called Mayor Clendenin and am not ready to judge this as a possible news story, but it strikes me as interesting since she was a flood**

**victim, has been mayor of a recovering town and has leveled some public criticisms about flood relief oversight. Can you confirm if she is coming on board as an employee and describe the role?**

- To ensure DHSEM staff has a full range of knowledge and experience sufficient to serve the citizens of West Virginia, we are attempting to hire a portion of our staff with a wide range of knowledge to meet the needs of the citizens. We desire some of our employees to have been flood victims and have experience with relief efforts and the general non-DHSEM side of what happens before, during and after disasters.
- In that light, we approached Ms. Clendenin to accept a position within DHSEM. This consideration centered on the fact that she has served in a dispatch center, been a flood victim, actively worked with project worksheets (PWs) and can serve as a DHSEM employee with knowledge of a victim's and applicant's point of view.
- She will serve as the Operations Officer and Watch Center supervisor, leading a 24x7x365 team that monitors the Arson, Emergency Response (DEP) Spill Alert System, Mine and Industrial Accident Rapid Response System, Safe Schools Helpline, Mine and Industrial Worker Tip Line, and other calls on a continual basis. She has the experience, expertise, and ability to perform well in this position.
- As we hire additional people, we will seek similar backgrounds by seeking and hiring individuals with all-round experience. This process is an effort to reshape the overall culture of DHSEM.